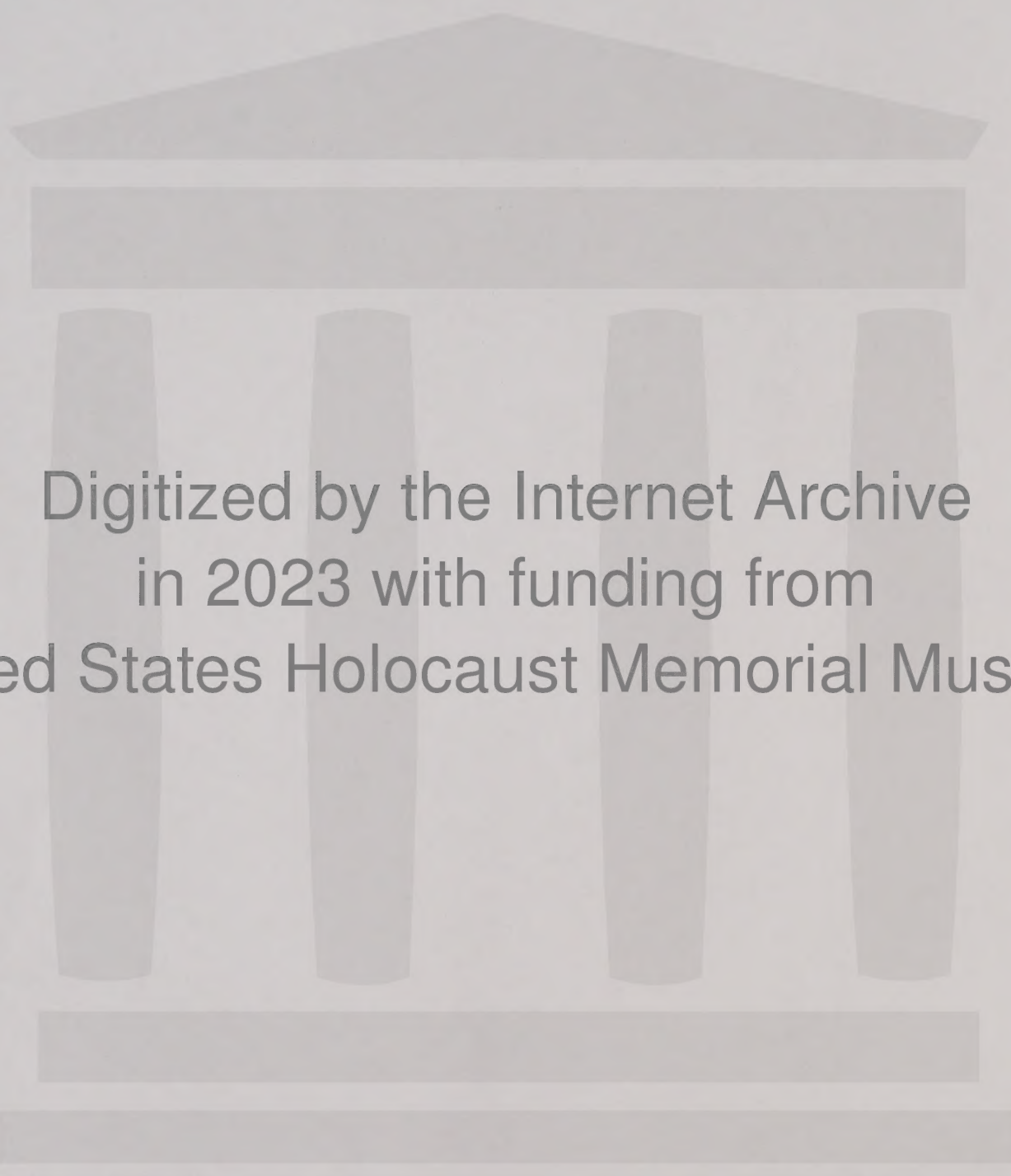




Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-678-9717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<https://archive.org/details/bib292132>

Aida Brydbord's Story

CHRISTMAS DINNER IN A NAZI OCCUPIED TOWN

written by her sister

Leah Lantz

I thought by 1990 my World War II stories would be forgotten. However, I was wrong. They are constantly surfacing through associations, and I am compelled to tell and share them.

In 1990, when I was visiting my sister Sarah before Christmas, I was reminded of a similar time in 1942 in my hometown, Linowo, under the Nazi occupation.

It was a crisp, beautiful day before Christmas, I recalled; but for us Jews, regardless of the weather, every day was dreary. On that day early in the morning, I was awakened by a hard knock at the front door and the frantic voice of my friend, Golda. She shouted that I should get up and dress quickly because Hans, the SS man, had just ordered her to gather me, Sandra, and Miriam. We must present ourselves instantly at the army kitchen to pluck the slaughtered geese assigned for the SS Unit's Christmas dinner. "Hurry! Hurry!" and Golda was gone. I was not much up to it on this cold winter day, but did I have a choice? We were mere teenagers, but schooled already in the art of survival.

As I entered the kitchen, the manager, wrapped in her oversized apron, was busy commanding her staff. They were preparing the vegetables delivered by the local peasants. She pointed for us to enter the next room where the four of us sat cross-legged in a circle on the frozen floor, a pile of dead geese in the middle.

Their bodies were still warm, just brought in from the slaughter house and exuding an unpleasant odor. Most of them had their eyes closed, their bloody necks hanging down, and others had their eyes

open and seemed still alive. They were of all sizes, some skinny and small, others plump and large, a sickening sight.

I wondered which one to choose for my assignment. Well, I tossed them around and picked a young and skinny one hoping that it would be easier to pluck than a fat one.

The job of plucking geese was not foreign to me. My parents were raising them for food, and my sisters and I made a ritual of cleaning them and saving the feathers for filling pillows. We had considered it a fun job, singing and joking in the process, but now it was a gloomy one. In a mood of surrender, the four of us drifted into the forced task.

The SS man approached us. He must have found the view in front of him somewhat amusing, if not repulsive. In a stern voice, he warned us, "Madchen, you had better be careful not to tear the skins of the geese while plucking them. Any tear will be punished appropriately. You know we do everything perfectly. So now, get going." He turned around and marched into the living room, sprawled in a chair, and opened a magazine.

We remained sitting on the floor in silence. We could not understand the rationale of the warning. What an irony! A tear in a dead goose's skin should matter so much, while his beatings of innocent people on the street was commonplace.

We did not talk, but exchanged glances of mutual understanding. Lowering our heads, with the stiff tips of our numb fingers, we carefully and gently kept plucking the chosen geese.

However, in spite of my super caution it happened - a big tear stared at me from the middle of my fowl's belly. I froze.

"Sarah," I whispered, showing her the tear in my goose. "Do you have a thread and needle? I will try to sew this up!"

Under other circumstances it might have sounded humorous, but now it was not funny to me. The fear of the punishment this man was capable of made me think irrationally.

Sandra's face was drawn; Golda had tears in her eyes. They shared my anxiety, but could do nothing to help. The goose, the innocent subject of my present crisis, lay in my hands and did not know the crucial role it played at this point in my life. So, we kept on plucking.

In the meantime, I cast fearful glances through the door at the German guard, trying to perceive his state of mind. He remained in the same position, a cigarette between his fingers, a magazine in his hand. The reality of my situation loomed more seriously by the minute. Feeling helpless, I prayed silently.

I stopped as I became aware of a towering presence over me. "You, in the green sweater." He pointed at me. "I do not like what I see. Why did that happen?" I wanted to explain, to answer. I opened my mouth, but the words refused to come out. I only raised my eyes, blurred with the pressing tears and smiled timidly. In a rough voice, he repeated the question. The answer was the same: Silence... tears.

He looked at me again. Our eyes - his blue, mine brown - met for a brief moment, but no words were spoken. I believe the anguish and suffering they reflected were enough to melt the icy part of the man's heart. He seemed to have risen above his evil impulses and failed to carry out his previous threat. He cast another glance at the tear on my goose, and with a gesture of his hand instructed us to

continue our work. When he disappeared in the other room, I gave a sigh of relief, overwhelmed by such unusual behavior for an SS man.

Since then, though many Christmases vanished in time, every year before the holiday when I see in the market customers carrying the smoothly plucked fowl - I remember.

I try not to dwell on it, after all, the war years abounded in even more life threatening episodes.

All this is history now, but I am here to tell the story.

